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ABSTRACT

This brochure (which can be used in the classroom as a poster) is intended to provide "a quick way into" the Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) English language survey and its findings. The brochure pinpoints the reading purpose and strands that the survey covered. It contains brief sections on performance over time; gender findings; assessment of reading skills; understanding main ideas, supporting ideas, and details; how well students performed; reflecting on the writers' ideas; and points for consideration. It also cites the writing purposes and strands that the survey covered, and discusses gender; selection and organization of ideas; functional writing; personal writing; imaginative writing; and points for consideration. (NKA)

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Feedback: AAP Fifth English Survey

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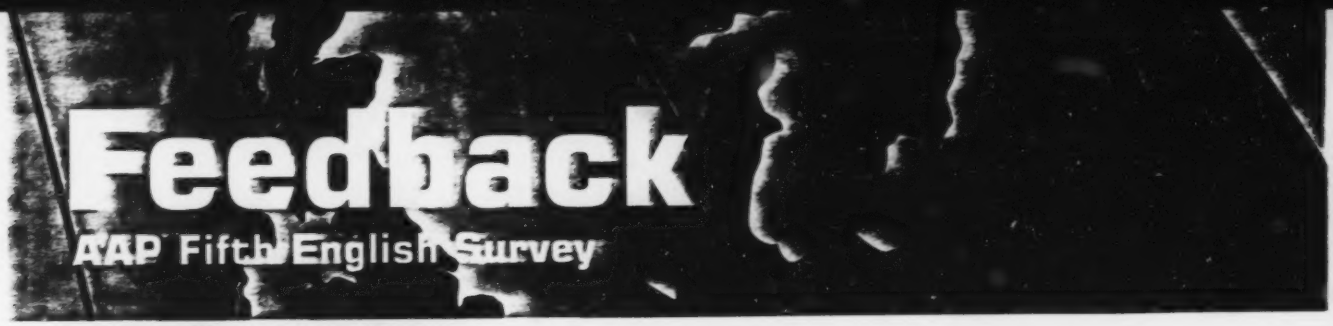

Feedback

AAP Fifth English Survey

What is the Assessment of Achievement Programme?

The Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) was established by the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) in 1981 to monitor the performance of pupils in particular areas of the curriculum. Since 1983 there have been regular surveys in three core curriculum areas:

- English language
- mathematics
- science

The main objectives of the AAP are to:

- assess what pupils in P4, P7 and S2 know and can do
- provide information on performance in relation to levels defined in the 5-14 National Guidelines
- provide evidence about changes in performance over time
- measure differences in the performances of boys and girls.

The surveys are intended to inform SEED, education authorities, teachers and other interested parties about the achievement of pupils and to indicate ways of improving teaching and learning.

Copies of the Information Pack have been distributed to all primary and secondary schools in Scotland. Additional copies are available from the Dissemination Officer, SEED Research Unit, Area 2B, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ (0131-244 0167)

The English Language Survey

The fifth AAP survey of pupils' attainment in English language was carried out in 1998 by two English specialists from Edinburgh University working with the AAP National Co-ordinator. Samples of pupils at P4, P7 and S2 were selected to be representative of pupils in all mainstream schools. Approximately 7000 pupils completed the assessments in May/June 1998. Assessment was based on the curriculum defined in the *National Guidelines: English Language 5-14*, specifically on reading and writing.

Each pupil completed two reading tasks followed by one writing task. The assessment tasks were thematically linked and required pupils to employ communication skills of reading and writing as a natural part of the work on the topic provided. Some tasks from the 1995 survey were repeated in order to provide evidence on changes in performance over time.

The reading and writing tasks were designed to cover the full range of ability at each stage. The framework was planned to provide the pupils with materials that were interesting, relevant, accessible and at the same time challenging.

The performance of pupils has been reported in terms of Levels A to E as set out in the *National Guidelines*.

Feedback

Feedback is an information source for teachers, based on the findings of the English language survey.

Use Feedback for:

- **Personal study** – reflecting on the achievement of your own pupils, reviewing assessment of class work and assessment tasks
- **Staff meetings** – reviewing, collectively or in groups, teaching programmes in relation to the 5-14 attainment targets
- **Staff development** – considering effective teaching strategies within schools and helping student teachers as part of their professional training.

Feedback is part of the Information Pack on the results of the fifth English language survey. It is intended to provide a quick way into the survey and its findings.

The Information Pack also includes a summary of the main findings of the survey. Look to the summary if you want more information about how the survey was conducted and more detail about the assessment tasks and the results.

The third part of the pack is a booklet of examples. Look here if you want to find out more about the types of items used in the survey and the responses of pupils.

Making it work together

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Reading

The Reading Purposes and Strands we covered

Purposes

To obtain information
To gain an understanding of the ideas, experiences and opinions presented in texts
To appreciate the feelings of others

Strands

Reading to reflect on the writer's ideas and craft
Awareness of genre

How we carried out the assessment of pupils

Introduction - Teacher reviews/introduces topic, discuss on sets context
Reading task 1
Break
Reading task 2
Pupils read a second text, narrative & or informative and related by theme to the first text and then complete the assignment which has been set

How well pupils performed

In order to achieve success at a specific level, pupils had to answer correctly 60 per cent or more of those items deemed to be appropriate at that Level. Results at P4 show that 68 per cent of pupils were achieving Level B or better, at P7 73 per cent were achieving Level D or better and at S2 41 per cent were achieving Level E with a further 40 per cent at Level D.

Performance over time

Some reading tasks used in the 1995 survey were used again in the 1998 survey. On these items performance at P7 remained stable whilst performance at P4 and S2 improved slightly.

Gender

P4 girls performed significantly better on:

- three of the five information tasks
- one of the five narrative tasks.

P7 girls performed significantly better on:

- four of the five narrative tasks.

S2 girls performed significantly better on:

- two of the five information tasks
- all of the seven narrative tasks.

Assessment of reading skills

Pupils use a range of skills when they read and understand a text. These skills may be assessed using a range of item types. The following examples illustrate how different aspects of the strands for reading were assessed in the survey.

Understanding main ideas, supporting ideas and details

Main ideas

It is important to establish even at the earliest stage that pupils have understood the main ideas in both narrative and information texts.

P4 example
After the pier was built, the village would be
better / worse / **different**

In this case the whole text concerns the changes that will be brought about by a new pier and the differing attitudes of the villagers to these changes.

Supporting ideas

Although some ideas are not central to a passage, they do support the main theme. Assessing pupils' awareness of them can give a clearer picture of their understanding of the important concepts they have read.

P4 example
Text: *'Mind where you are putting your great big feet.' Hamish looked down, and there behind the rocks lay a huge sea urchin.*

The sea urchin was afraid Hamish would
catch / lose / **step on** him.

P7/S2 example
Text: *Winds . . . leave a trail of destruction when the hurricane strikes the shore. The strongest winds are in the belt around the calm eye.*

The strong winds of a hurricane cause great **destruction/damage** but the eye is **calm**

Directed to a particular section of the text, pupils had to find supporting information and fill the gaps in order to complete the sentence or summary accurately.

Details

Some detail is require close reading of a text

P7 S2 example

Text: *Finn had begun to add map features which were not actually there although he suspected that Grandpa would not have approved of this. Now there was a fort on Red Hill, which he had named Tigh na Finn, Finn's house.*

There was a fort on Hillsay.

True **False** Can't Tell

Pupils had to read carefully and might have had to check the text a second time to determine that the fort did not actually exist but had been added to the map by Finn.

P7 S2 example

Text: *Millions of African men, women and children were transported across the Atlantic to provide the enormous workforce needed to work on the huge plantations in the southern states.*

Forty per cent of slaves died on the way to America.

True False **Can't Tell**

The Can't Tell option discourages reliance on memory and usually demands that pupils re-read a section of text to be sure of the correct answer.

The items above all use objective type questions to assess pupils' skills. It is also possible to assess this strand using items which require the pupils to summarise.

Summarise

One test of overall understanding of a passage is to ask pupils to explain the content to someone else.

P4 example

This passage tells me how to look after a goldfish.

P7 S2 example

Write one sentence to explain to a friend what this passage is about.

Pupils sometimes find it difficult to use their own words to summarise the content of a passage.

Reflecting on the writers' ideas

As they read, pupils will gradually become more involved with the writer's thoughts in order to appreciate the ideas being communicated.

Inference

Pupils learn to move beyond purely literal responses to a text. They learn to read between the lines and discover meaning that is not explicit but where the reader may infer.

P7/S2 example

Text: *The castle has been gradually disintegrating . . . , the waves crash below, as always. Careful!*

The castle is in a dangerous position.

True / False / Can't Tell

Feelings

Careful reading is sometimes required to choose the correct degree, feeling or aspect of relationships between characters at a particular point in a narrative text.

P4 example

Text: *Ben was scared of the dark. He was scared of dogs . . . Ben was shivering now and fighting not to cry. He did his best to keep still so that Gully wouldn't notice him.*

When Ben found Gully under the bunk, Ben felt

happy / **very scared** / angry

P7/S2 example

Text: *She crawled quickly from their hideout and walked up to him. She had no fear of this ancient white-haired, black-faced old man.*

When Julilly first saw the old man she felt

excited / frightened / depressed / **trusting** / cautious

Multiple choice items were most often used to assess pupils' understanding of the nuances of feelings and relationships.

Prediction

Pupils can use the ideas they have read to look a step further to make predictions about how characters might be expected to behave.

P7/S2 example

Who is the most likely to make the following remark?

She seems to understand my feelings.

Colin / **Emma** / Aunt Laura / Aunt Patsy / Richard

The statement is not made in the text, but an understanding of the characters and their situations allows pupils to predict which character would be the most likely to say these words.

Abstract concepts

As pupils progress they will acquire more sophisticated reading skills, gradually becoming able to summarise abstract ideas and generate their own vocabulary to express these concepts.

Understanding the writer's craft

Looking closely at the way language is used to bring a text to life helps pupils become more aware of the writer's craft and may encourage them to use these strategies in their own writing.

Vocabulary

It is important that pupils understand the vocabulary used by the author. They will learn that there is often more than one way of communicating ideas.

P4 example

Text: *Without stopping to think, Ben clutched at Gully. His face went down onto Gully's warm fur and his arm wrapped itself around the dog's great neck.*

Underline the word that gives the correct meaning.

Ben clutched at Gully.
grabbed / shouted / smiled

Genre

Pupils exposed to a wide range of texts will learn to distinguish between different genres from the content and language used and from the appearance of the text on the page.

P7/S2 example

What kind of book do you think this passage comes from?

a reference book on American slavery / a dictionary of famous people / a story about an escaped slave / a reference book about American geography

Language

Learning to notice an author's choice of words can help pupils to understand what makes a text enjoyable and may encourage them to experiment in their own writing.

P4 example

There are different words in the story that sound like the noise of thunder. Find two of these words.

Rumble Crash

S2 example

List five words or phrases from the story that illustrate the evil or unpleasant nature of the enemy.

lethal
sinister
diabolical
cold-blooded
horrible

The author's choice of language creates an unmistakable atmosphere of malevolence.

Some figures of speech are easily recognisable and pupils have little trouble identifying them once they have been taught.

P7/S2 example

Like a long whale breaking the surface

Other features are more subtle and require pupils to be careful about the language used by the author.

A metaphor creates a vivid image by describing something with words which are usually used to refer to something else, e.g. a blazing wind.

Find the metaphor used to describe the exploding house.

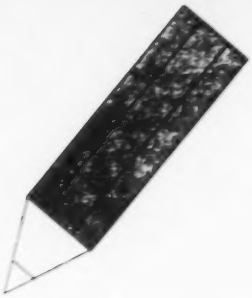
a huge orange flower

Points for consideration

When pupils read . . .

- *How can we help them to read with understanding?*
  - by encouraging them to reflect on and discuss what they read
  - by asking them to make inferences and predictions and to draw conclusions.
- *How can they use their reading to help improve their writing?*
  - by examining the author's use of language
  - by making comparisons of different genres.
- *How might they consider some of the different aspects of a text?*
  - by examining the author's opinion or point of view
  - by looking at the relationships between characters
  - by discussing the emotional reactions of characters to a situation.
- *What kinds of texts might they examine to compare different kinds of writing?*
  - information texts, instructions, plays, descriptive passages, dialogue in narrative, newspaper articles, abstracts.
- *How might they be encouraged to respond to different kinds of texts?*
  - make a drawing or diagram
  - do a piece of personal writing
  - dramatise a scene.
- *How can we encourage pupils, particularly boys, to take an interest in and enjoy a wide variety of reading materials?*
  - by giving pupils a clear purpose for their reading
  - by building on their own interests
  - by trying to convey our own enthusiasm.

Writing



The Writing Purposes and Strands we covered

Purposes
To convey information
To express feelings
To plan, express and explain ideas and opinions
To record and relate experiences

Strands
Functional writing
Personal writing
Imaginative writing
Punctuation and structure
Spelling

Assessment Procedure

Review:
Pupils review context with teacher and consider writing topic

Planning:
Pupils plan writing, optional planning page provided

Writing task:
Pupils complete one piece of writing, imaginative, functional or personal

How well pupils performed

All the writing tasks were marked using the National Test writing criteria. Performance shows that Level B or better is being achieved by 65 per cent of P4 pupils; at P7 36 per cent were achieving Level D or better; and at S2 23% were achieving Level E.

Performance over time

Some writing tasks used in the 1995 survey were used again in the 1998 survey. On these items performance at P4 remained stable whilst performance at P7 and S2 showed a slight improvement.

Gender

P4 girls performed significantly better on:
- all three functional tasks
- both personal tasks
- one of the three imaginative tasks.

P7 girls performed significantly better on:
- all four functional tasks
- two of the three personal tasks
- both imaginative tasks.

S2 girls performed significantly better on:
- all four functional tasks
- two of the three personal tasks
- both imaginative tasks.

Functional writing

Choice and use of language

When the context is familiar P4 pupils are able to use language appropriately and with assurance. They need practice in the less familiar contexts of letters and news articles.

Similarly, many writers at P7 and S2 need to acquire more confidence in the use of terms and phrases specific to the tasks of writing reports and newspaper articles.

At all stages pupils must understand the purpose for writing and become aware of the appropriate style and form to use for each task.

Selection and organisation of ideas

P4 pupils show great enthusiasm for writing, but they need to become aware that using linking words to connect their thoughts and sentences will help them communicate their ideas to others.

For pupils at S2 and P7 finding ideas was not a problem but organising them into a logical and reasoned report or letter proved difficult.

Many pupils at P7 and S2 should learn that use of paragraphs will clarify and lend structure to their writing.

Personal writing

Choice and use of language

Many pupils at all stages were able to find the appropriate language to achieve a sympathetic tone and express personal feelings where the context was familiar.

P7 and S2 pupils could be encouraged to experiment with the language needed in less familiar contexts or to express abstract ideas.

Selection and organisation of ideas

Pupils need to know that in personal writing, as in all writing, it is important that the introduction is clear and that there is a suitable ending.

Older pupils should be encouraged to share their personal feelings and responses. Natural reticence might be overcome if they are provided with contexts in which their point of view is seen to be valued.

Imaginative writing

Choice and use of language

A few writers at all stages provided some outstanding work. Pupils should be introduced to the conventions of story telling and should explore the effective use of language to create convincing characters and setting.

The use of figurative language should be explored and encouraged.

Selection and organisation of ideas

Pupils at P7 and S2 should use a variety of sentence structures to hold the readers attention and give their writing vitality. Dialogue can add colour to writing but needs to be relevant.

A good story should include a beginning, middle and end, with sufficient detail to make the storyline clear and a satisfactory overall shape. A planning page can be used to organise ideas which should be expanded in the story itself.

Technical skills

Although there is a wide range of spelling abilities, some of the inaccuracies in the spelling of commonly used words might be eliminated by checking a finished piece of work. Early spelling strategies continue to need development and reinforcement throughout the primary years and into secondary.

The purpose of punctuation, to support the structure and meaning of the writing, must be made clear, at all stages. Pupils should understand that capitals, full stops, speech marks and apostrophes should not be used randomly. Pupils should be made aware that punctuation, linking and paragraphing can improve writing considerably by helping to give it shape and structure.

Points for consideration

When pupils write . . .

- *How can they be encouraged to plan before they write?*
  - group/class discussion
  - planning page
  - wordbank.
- *How can they make their writing more lively and interesting?*
  - by choosing language imaginatively to create their own atmosphere and setting
  - by experimenting with words
  - by varying sentence length and structure.
- *How can we help them improve the shape of their writing?*
  - by providing a clear purpose and audience
  - by planning a beginning, middle and end
  - by stressing the importance of paragraphing and linking of ideas.
- *What can we do to help them improve their technical skills?*
  - by helping them understand the need for punctuation
  - by encouraging the use of dictionary, wordbank, thesaurus and their own word lists.
- *What kinds of writing should they be encouraged to experiment with?*
  - stories, instructions, letters (personal and business), poetry, reports, journalistic articles, autobiography, drama, advertising, posters.
- *How can we encourage pupils, especially boys, to enjoy and take pride in their written work?*
  - by using their own interests to stimulate their writing
  - by demonstrating that the ability to write well is a useful and necessary skill
  - by sharing pupils' work with others through reading, publishing or displaying (computers may help).

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